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ABSTRACT

Employment counseling is a set of interventions designed to help clients identify and resolve issues in employment-related decisions. This digest examines Canada's measurement model which was designed to enhance understanding of counseling's function. The model uses four employability dimensions: (1) career/occupation decision making; (2) skills enhancement; (3) job search; and (4) employment maintenance. In theory, these dimensions are sequential. Clients should make occupational choices prior to undertaking training programs. However, counselors are expected to assist clients with any employability issue. To assess progress, results are gathered at three stages of the counseling process. In stage one, goal setting and achievement, up to nine goals can be set and measured in each of the four employability dimensions. Stage two, outcome, assesses three possible outcomes after service termination. And in the third stage, impact, indicators of impact of service on clients are measured. Although much quantitative data has been recorded, more such analysis is anticipated. Also, a better tracking system is being developed for human and financial resource allocation in order to determine if employment counseling services are cost effective. Similarly, a monitoring guide for employment counseling services is under preparation and service standards for employment counseling are being developed. (RJM)

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A Measurement Model for Employment Counseling: ERIC Digest.

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by Guy Busque

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ERIC DIGEST

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A Measurement Model For Employment Counseling

Guy Busque

Overview

Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC) is a federal department offering employment services to three client groups: workers, employers, and community agencies. Employment counseling is available to worker clients through a three-level structure: 450 Canada Employment Centres (CEC), 10 regional offices (one per province), and national headquarters. HRDC is one of the largest counseling service providers in Canada, conducting almost 2,000 interviews a day across its network of local offices.

"Employment Counseling" is a set of interventions designed to help clients identify and resolve issues which must be faced in making and carrying out employment-related decisions. HRDC policy states that counseling services "shall be provided to clients identified through the Planning and Accountability process, taking into account regional and national priorities....." To address accountability issues, HRDC has developed, and is implementing, a measurement system within its organization.

The HRDC Measurement Model

The HRDC measurement model has been designed to facilitate common understanding of the counseling function and the identification of what is measured and when. It applies to both individual and group counseling.

Employability Dimensions

In employment counseling at HRDC, four employability dimensions leading to labor market integration are addressed.

1. *Career/Occupation Decision Making:* exploration, analysis and selection of career or occupation options. The focus here is on a suitable and firm career or occupational choice.

2. *Skills Enhancement:* acquisition of skills required for a specific occupation or of generic skills such as literacy, interpersonal and self-management skills. This is often designated as job preparation or training.

3. *Job Search:* identification of job vacancies, contacting employers, completing job applications, behavior during job interviews, and being hired. This dimension includes all activities directly associated with the actual integration or re-integration of unemployed workers into the labor market.

4. *Employment Maintenance:* identification of unstable patterns in the employment record and recognition of the need to take remedial actions. Even though few Canadians express this as an employment concern, many do need assistance in breaking the employment–unemployment cycle.

In theory, these dimensions are sequential: clients should make occupational choices prior to undertaking training programs; once fully qualified, they should be looking for jobs; once in the labor market, they should be showing stable employment records. However, in practice, counselors are expected to assist clients with any employability issue, even back-and-forth or across two dimensions concurrently.

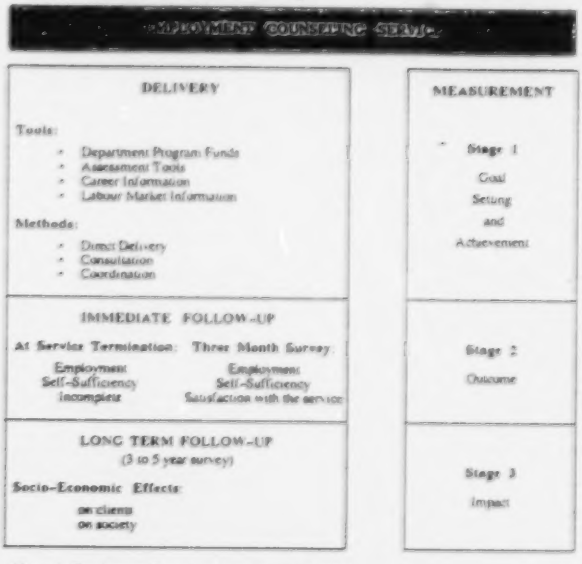

Figure 1 : Employment Counseling Measurement in HRDC

Measurement Stages

For measurement purposes, results are gathered at three stages of the counseling process (See Figure 1):

At Stage 1, up to nine goals can be set and measured in each of the four employability dimensions.

- During the intervention, the achievement of goals is reported for each employability dimension.
- Outcomes per employability dimension are recorded by counselors at the end of counseling and from independent follow-up surveys after 3-6 months.
- Long term impact is assessed 3 to 5 years later.

At stage 2, three possible outcomes are identified upon service termination.

- Employment: clients have found full-time, part-time, or temporary work
- Self-sufficiency: clients have achieved self-sufficiency in the dimensions in which goals were set and they assume responsibility for any employment barriers
- Incomplete: counselors are unable to continue counseling for various reasons: lost contact, no longer in labour market, referral to external agency, and so forth.

At Stage 3, indicators of impact are measured.

- impact of service on clients (employment or skill transfer)
- indicators of socio-economic impact (reduced government dependency, participation of designated groups in labor market, gender balance in occupations).

All in all, 33 units of business and 5 performance indicators have been proposed. Although socio-demographic descriptors of clients and some process data are gathered, the emphasis is on outcome measures. Data input and reporting are automated and regional and national management reports are produced monthly. The system interface and all reports are bilingual.

Preliminary Data

Selected counseling data from October 1, 1993 to March 31, 1994 indicate that

- About 1,000 clients were assessed daily in CEC offices: 70% were unemployment insurance recipients, 46% were women.
- 74% of clients set goals in skills enhancement, 40% in career decision making, 22% in job search, and 2% in employment maintenance.
- Less than half the total number of counselees had completed counseling during that period. 61% who terminated were either self-sufficient or employed; those remaining were either still receiving counseling or had been referred to a longer term intervention.

Conclusions and Future Directions

1. More quantitative analysis is anticipated at regional and national headquarters as confidence in the database increases.

2. A better tracking system is being developed for human and financial resource allocation in order to determine if employment counseling services are cost-effective and to establish the relative cost-effectiveness for different client groups.

3. To address qualitative analysis, a monitoring guide for employment counseling services is under preparation and service standards for employment counseling are being developed.

4. It is important to measure other outcomes (e.g., self-sufficiency, self-confidence, self-esteem, self-efficacy, and client satisfaction with the service). Joint assessment (by client and by counselor) gives a quick measure; however, the validity of this measure needs to be investigated.

5. Since a good portion of counseling service is delivered externally (by HRDC partners), the same counseling measures should be adopted by all partners across Canada dealing with HRDC clients. Therefore, the use of the framework needs to be expanded throughout the employment counseling network. There are positive indicators that the framework is facilitating the systematic collection of outcome counseling data and the ongoing management of employment counseling services to Canadian workers.

Guy Busque is currently responsible for measurement and evaluation projects in the Operations Branch of Employment Services at national headquarters (Human Resources Development Canada,

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